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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [BL](#) [KPAO](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: AMBASSADOR'S TRIP TO SUCRE

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: On September 4, Ambassador Goldberg traveled to Bolivia's constitutional capital of Sucre to participate in the official launch of the Sucre Virtual Presence Post (VPP) and to meet newly-elected Prefect Savina Cuellar. While in Sucre, the Ambassador also visited two USAID projects: a water sanitation plant where the Ambassador participated in a food for work program; and a clinic which the Ambassador opened with Sucre Mayor Aydee Nava. The Ambassador also visited a local school for a presentation on the Narcotics Affairs Section's (NAS) D.A.R.E. anti-drug training and gave a speech to Martin Luther King Jr. language-scholarship recipients at the Bolivian-American Center. In a meeting with local opinion-makers, the Ambassador heard about Sucre's problems as an opposition city surrounded by Movement Toward Socialism (MAS)-aligned countryside.

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Sucre: Bolivia's Small-town, Pro-American Second Capital
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¶2. (C) With a population of 250,000 and a laid-back, lowland lifestyle, the constitutional capital of Sucre welcomed the VPP launch on September 4 with attendance of over 250 (despite a change in location after the first venue--the National Archives--was unable to host the event due to bomb threats warning against a national building hosting a USG event.) The prefect gave a speech in her native Quechua to open the event, after the Ambassador had welcomed the prefect and the invited guests in Quechua and Spanish. Members of Bolivia's beleaguered Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal were in attendance, as were departmental and municipal leaders. Prefect Cuellar, who has been in office only since June, toured the exhibits, spending time particularly at the USAID and NAS tables.

¶3. (C) On September 5, Sucre's relative compactness encouraged the Ambassador's party to walk between events. The difference between the USG's popularity in La Paz and Sucre was obvious in the many times the group was stopped so that residents could shake the Ambassador's hand and thank

him for his visit and for USG programs in Bolivia. Repeatedly people on the street apologized for the government's rhetoric and said, "If the Chapare (Evo's stronghold that is rejecting USAID presence) doesn't want your programs, bring them here." This sentiment had been broached by Prefect Cuellar and her advisors the day before. In the lunch with opinion makers on September 5, former Sucre mayor and member of congress German Gutierrez suggested that the apparent popularity of the USG and the Ambassador was less a question of being pro-American and more a sign of desperation: "Twenty years ago we would have attacked you like Evo does. But now Evo is attacking us, and everyone is scared." Political analyst and lawyer Juan Luis Gantier asked Emboff, "If there is a civil war, will you protect us?" The Bolivian participants in the opinion-makers lunch agreed that Bolivia is already in a state of crisis and confrontation verging on civil war, and Gutierrez suggested that because the central government has more money and more might, the opposition regions will be forced to take rapid actions to counter the government's superior size and resource base. They also called on the international community to denounce Evo and his government's "descent toward totalitarianism."

Welcoming the Ambassador... and USG Money

14. (C) Sucre Mayor Aydee Nava asked for continued infrastructure and health support, Prefect Cuellar asked for support for the poor and for democracy, and one of the invitees to the opinion-makers lunch suggested that the USG "get radical" and build Sucre an airport to spite Evo and La Paz. USAID supports development in 23 municipalities in Chuquisaca, encouraging economic growth through economic opportunities for farm families, improving access to justice, building effective departmental government, and strengthening public and NGO health facilities. NAS also has cooperation programs in Chuquisaca funding D.A.R.E. training in schools and supporting the counter-narcotic police force FELCN. A common question at the VPP launch was "when will you have offices here?" with the consensus being that Virtual was nice, but Real would be better. (Note: Post has no plans to open offices in Sucre. End note.)

Savina Cuellar, Evo's Indigenous Opposition

15. (C) In the Ambassador's first meeting with newly-elected Chuquisaca Prefect, Savina Cuellar explained that she is under pressure to meet the high expectations of her department in the short time remaining before new elections are called. She asked for specific help (such as a firetruck for the city of Sucre, "because the instability is resulting in many blazes") and general overall assistance such as a visit to the United States to view government best-practices and USAID democracy support to her budget office to improve expenditures and transparency. To avoid any appearance of a "secret" or "conspiratorial" nature, the meeting was held in the prefecture and the press was invited to record the initial introductions.

16. (C) Also in the meeting were long-time employees of the prefecture and Cuellar's new corps of advisors, many of them ex-MAS Constituent Assembly members like Cuellar, who broke with the MAS over the question of full capital status for Sucre. (Note: The prominence of these ex-MAS advisors frustrates the opposition inter-institutional committee that put its weight behind Cuellar in the June election. They had hoped that their members would form the core of Cuellar's team, but she instead has brought in a more leftist group of former associates. The inter-institutional committee's hopes that Cuellar would have popular support in the countryside have also been disappointed; although Cuellar enjoys over 90 percent popularity in the city of Sucre, much of the countryside has remained MAS-aligned despite Cuellar's indigenous background and grassroots credentials. End note.) Cuellar's son, Leonardo AVALOS Cuellar, was also present at

the meeting in his current role as an unpaid assistant. Although Cuellar invited many of the participants to speak, Avalos often took over the meeting and seemed to be the dominant personality in the room after Cuellar herself. Observers commented to Emboffs during the visit that Leonardo Avalos Cuellar's prominence in the Prefect's office worries some residents, who fear that it is a sign that Prefect Cuellar is not ready for the office. Prefect Cuellar is apparently not comfortable speaking in Spanish--she has a strong accent and repeated certain memorized phrases during her discussion--and is seen by many outsiders as needing significant polish before she can be a contender for national office, as many hope she will become.

17. (C) Cuellar has not shied away from controversy in her first months in office. She rejects Evo's classist rhetoric, saying, "Evo is the racist: he is dividing Bolivia." On September 6 Cuellar demanded that Evo resign as president since he "uses the Armed Forces to repress the people" and has not apologized for the three deaths in Sucre in 2007. (Note: Two of the many hundreds of Chuquisaqueños wounded during the 2007 confrontations with the police and armed forces were in the prefecture during the Ambassador's meeting with Cuellar, and their doctor presented Emboff with requests for medical assistance for these "heroes of the revolution." End note.) Because of her alliance with the traditional opposition parties and her break from the MAS, Cuellar has been labeled as a sell-out and a traitor to the indigenous cause.

18. (C) Comment: Whereas Evo does not speak any indigenous language well and generally limits himself to a rote repetition of "long live coca, death to the Yankees" in Quechua, Cuellar gives many of her public speeches in Quechua. Although she lacks Evo's leadership of a national union such as the cocaleros, Cuellar's leadership roles in regional organizations is evident in her public speaking style and her confidence with the press. End comment.

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BIO NOTE on Prefect Cuellar
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19. (U) With her wide smile and traditional indigenous clothing, Savina Cuellar has gone from relative unknown to national figure since her election as Prefect of Chuquisaca in June of 2008. Born in the poor community of Ichhupampa, Tarabuco (a region known for its elaborate indigenous weaving) Cuellar speaks fluent Quechua and has a history of leadership roles in Chuquisaca women's organizations. A widow and mother of seven children, Cuellar learned to read only recently and was previously a domestic employee, a used-clothing saleswoman, a small-farmer, and a union leader. Cuellar is an evangelical Christian and credits her faith with the healing of her late husband's blindness. She entered into national politics as a Constituent Assembly member representing Evo Morales' Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party partially in response to her search for justice after her father and husband were killed in a robbery. She broke with the MAS out of disagreement with the MAS's rejection of full-capital status for Sucre and objections to the MAS's violation of Constituent Assembly rules: "We fought for legality and the full capital in Sucre and (the other MAS assembly members) violated the rules, so there was no other option than to separate myself. I always respected the law." In the first months of her tenure, she has been opposed by MAS-aligned social groups, who have blockaded the city and demanded the appointment of MAS-aligned sub-prefects.

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110. (C) Although President Evo Morales attempts to frame himself as Bolivia's (and the world's) representative indigenous leader (planning to meet with indigenous groups in Alaska in late September, for example, and claiming that "the Indian" is the only one who can truly protect the

environment), he faces a small amount of indigenous opposition in his own country, where the majority of citizens self-identify as indigenous and many indigenous leaders do not agree with Evo's socialist and totalitarian tendencies. In the words of Prefect Cuellar, "For me, Evo doesn't represent the indigenous people, because they're dying of hunger. Evo says there is a democracy, but what I see is a dictatorship." Evo's attacks on Prefect Cuellar, through MAS-aligned social groups and his public statements, show that Evo feels no need for inter-indigenous solidarity. Meanwhile, Sucre and Chuquisaca are locked in a microcosm of Bolivia's current crisis, with the MAS-aligned countryside confronting and sometimes blockading the opposition-aligned capital of Sucre. As violent incidents continue throughout the country, Sucre could again become a focus of conflict.

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